



## **The Art and Skill of Listening**

Some business people perceive communication skills to mean talking, others writing, and yet others the use of their PDA. The most human, and least mentioned, of the communication skills is listening.

The typical day of business people is filled with meetings and discussions that require hours of listening, with very little time devoted to learning how. In many situations managers can spend less than an hour a day at their desks. The amount of information and processing that is needed on a daily basis is remarkable. This can lead to information overload, frustration, confusion and stress.

It is known that if we remain quiet and listen almost all of our questions will be answered. Yet we rush to get things quickly and jump in with comments and questions, hardly waiting for the end of a sentence. No wonder so many second and third meetings on the same topic are necessary.

Here are two ways to begin to listen in a more meaningful and efficient manner.

1. Listen with an open, accepting and uncritical mind with no expectations. Leave the internal questions and analysis for later. Those who know how to do this enable others to be themselves and to communicate comfortably and confidently. They develop trust along the way as well.

The art involved is a quiet mind each time you listen; the skill is in achieving it. Have you ever tried talking to a radio? It seems like a ridiculous question because everyone knows that it is impossible. Yet that is what we are doing much of the time. Most people are busy holding an internal conversation rather than listening. Begin by becoming physically still with two feet firmly on the floor, and then take a deep breath and empty your mind. Become "grounded" and then pay attention to your breathing for thirty seconds. Do this before making telephone calls or speaking at a meeting.

2. Once you have become grounded and centered, you are on your way to becoming present-being in the moment, rather than mentally racing off to the next meeting or to all the things on your desk that need doing. The most important aspect of any communication can be summed up in one sentence: "I want to be here". You have to want to be where you are at the moment. When you are not "here", your mind is distracted, and you not available for what is going on directly in front of you. Where you are at this moment is the only place you can be. It does not help you or the person with whom you are speaking to wish you were not there.

Have you ever been guilty of planning or rehearsing what you were going to say next, only to have someone say what you were going to say? It is impossible to listen when you are busy planning. When we do that, there is no chance of spontaneity, creativity or intuition and every chance of missing the point entirely. To avoid this situation, you have to trust your mind will have an appropriate response-and it will.

Being fully present invites open, honest communication, allows you to have a sense of what is happening, and encourages other people to talk comfortably and know they are being heard. Some tangible characteristics of people who are "present" include: alert eyes, rather than a very uncomfortable glaring "eye contact", an open, responsive face, a physical body that looks centred and energetic at the same time, a response to what the speaker is saying rather than bringing the conversation back to him/herself and lastly, asking supportive, open questions that evoke information rather than suppressing or interrupting it.